

Today we celebrate Respect Life Sunday. In fact, we set aside all of October as a time to cherish and treasure human life: from the moment of conception until natural death. This is a time to be reminded to truly celebrate and believe in the value of every life, every month of the year. It's a time to be reminded that we want more babies and families and children, because life is great! In the very first book of the Bible it is written, seven times, once after each day of Creation: And He saw that it was very good.

I'm not sure exactly when it started, perhaps sometime during the late 19th century in the midst of the industrial revolution, we started to doubt the value of all human life. In the west, some started to think there were too many people. There was a struggle with poverty as people moved to the cities looking for jobs in the new factories and industries that were coming into existence, as we moved from an agrarian culture to an urban culture. The transition wasn't easy. So much so that not all intellectuals and spiritual leaders had faith that human discipline, virtue and ingenuity would enable the world to sustain more life, at an even higher standard of living. Some started to doubt the Lord's command in the book of Genesis: Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and subdue it.

A classic example was Thomas Malthus, an English Economist and cleric. He predicted we were on a course towards widespread starvation within a decade or two and that the human population would level off and not grow. He didn't foresee the full extent of human ingenuity. For example, he didn't see how much productivity would increase. In my grandparent's generation, 40% of the US population was needed for agriculture; Now only around 3% is needed. Through technology and knowhow, things have improved immensely.

The Lord did say, "The poor will always be with you." It is true we will always struggle to bring about the Lord's Kingdom, but to give up on life is never the answer. To live in fear is never the answer. To fear there will not be enough, is not the answer.

In our own country, we have seen this trend to fear life and therefore to attempt to limit it. We have seen this pessimism in various ways. Most of us probably do not know that contraception was looked down upon by the vast majority in the early 20th century. It was only in 1965 that it was legalized. "Be fruitful and multiply..." forget that. The original idea was that contraception would only be used by married couples to take away some of the stress of being married. But instead of divorces going down, they went up. Also, premarital sex skyrocketed and we ended up with more children born out of wedlock. Ironically, instead of less poverty, poverty increased. Then, just four years later in 1969, we legalized no fault divorce, ignoring today's readings and Jesus' words. Maybe the thought was that this would help people find happier marriages. Instead, many today who live together aren't even planning on marrying. Marriages have plummeted.

Then the thought may have been, we need abortion, because contraception isn't working. So in 1973, just four years later, we legalized abortion, resulting in over 55,000,000 deaths in a mother's womb of all places. Being old fashioned, I place most of the blame on the fathers of those children. Incidentally, a disproportionate number of Planned Parenthood abortion clinics ended up being built close to poor and minority neighborhoods. They have become so good at

what they do that American couples who struggle with infertility have difficulty finding babies to adopt.

Then in 2015, gay marriage was legalized. In the Bible it is written: God created Man. Male and Female he created them. This is why a man leaves his mother and father, and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh. When fertility is separated from the marital embrace, all sorts of unnatural things happen.

As a culture, in so many ways, we have gone a long way from cherishing, loving, and respecting life. We have moved a long way from the Christian understanding of marriage, family, and human sexuality. It was all done in the name of creating a more humane life. Now we even find in our schools prepubescent children being encouraged to ask themselves if they are boys or girls. Transgenderism is being mainstreamed.

What do we do about all this? Each of us must decide if we want our country to be filled with a Christian spirit or a different spirit. There is no in between. We can't have "a little Christianity, but not too much." We are either going to be hot, or cold. If we try a lukewarm version of Christianity, our culture will transform slowly but surely, into something we won't recognize, a culture that will not respect and protect human life, but rather sacrifice life to the gods of convenience, luxury, and ease.

I remember a few years ago a controversy over developing treatments for Alzheimer's. There was a treatment being developed which necessitated the use of abortion to obtain fetal stem cells. Fortunately, other doctors pointed to other treatments with the same potential for success developed using adult stem cells. Catholic Bio-ethic centers supported these doctors.

What I find strange right now is that, in the effort to find a treatment for COVID-19, all the vaccines are in some way derived - remotely most theologians say - from aborted children. And all three major vaccines, last I read, have been developed in this manner. I've never heard the issue raised as it was in the past in regard to curing Alzheimer's whether or not we couldn't come up with a vaccine derived in such a way that there would be no connection to taking innocent life. I wonder if this will set a precedent for future health research that could manifest even more disrespect for human life?

One of you reminded me that I had promised to preach a pro-life message this weekend. I must admit, at times, I feel despondent about the direction of our culture, as many do. But then I remember what the prophet Isaiah wrote about many of the priests and scribes of his day. He said they were dogs that did not bark. On judgment day, when the accuser reads out my sins in front of the Great Judge, our Lord and Savior, I hope I won't hear: Fr. Joe, you were a dog that didn't bark.

Let me close by saying, we are a people of Faith, Hope and Love. There is never a reason to despair, be of little faith, or to allow our love to grow cold. We can make a difference. First, we need to reform our own minds, hearts and lives so they conform to the Mind of Christ. It involves a lifetime of prayer, discernment, humility and discipline. Second, we must be witnesses. Witnesses by living in a way that shows we value and cherish life. We can do little

things like tithing generously of our time, treasure, and talent to support, for example, Pillars, our local homeless shelter. We can also show our respect for life by never saying things like, “Yes, we had a third child. It was our little oops.” Finally, we can get involved politically: I just received a letter from the USCCB that I was asked to read: (read letter). One temptation is to say: What can a phone call accomplish? MUCH. We are called to be witnesses, the Greek word is “martyrs.” Remember, in the end, God’s kingdom of Justice and Peace and Life will come. There’s no reason to stop living faithfully, hopefully and lovingly.

<https://www.votervoice.net/USCCB/Campaigns/88618/Respond>